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ABSTRACT

A basic assumption in teacher education is that teacher education programs are the primary influence in the thinking of new English teachers. A study evaluated that assumption. The researchers worked with four first-year high school or middle school English teachers to identify decision points in their teaching and to name the influences that affected those decisions. The primary data sources for the study were anthropological field notes taken during seven or eight monthly visits to each classroom and stimulated recall interviews based on those field notes. Participants and the researcher examined and discussed the field notes in order to identify decision points in the participants' teaching and to explore the thinking behind the decisions. Data analysis revealed that the decisions made by these new teachers were of two types: instructional and managerial. For each of these decision types, the primary categories of influence were student needs and prior experience. Other influences included normative influences (administration, curriculum guides, department regulations, etc.), availability of materials, university/teacher education programs, and professional development. Furthermore, the participants did not articulate the influence(s) on many decisions. The findings suggest the need for enhanced pre-student teaching experiences, multiple sections of one preparation that will allow new teachers to refine their decision making, and mentor programs for new teachers. (Contains 22 references and 2 notes.) (RS)

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WHY BEGINNING ENGLISH TEACHERS DO WHAT THEY DO

A Paper Presented at the Annual Meeting of the

Wisconsin Council of Teachers of English-Language Arts

April 30, 1999
Madison, Wisconsin

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ABSTRACT

A basic assumption in teacher education is that teacher education programs are the primary influence in the thinking of new teachers. I designed this study to evaluate that assumption. In this study I worked with four first-year teachers to identify decision points in their teaching and to name the influences that affected those decisions. More specifically, I addressed the following questions: What did the participants/beginning teachers identify as decisions? What influences affected the decisions the beginning teachers identified? Did the influences which affected the beginning teachers' decisions change over time? Did patterns emerge and can those patterns be used to identify the beliefs that inform them?

Four first-year teachers were selected to participate in this study. Each was interviewed at the start of the study to determine her reasons for becoming a teacher and her initial feelings about her current teaching position. The primary data sources for the study were anthropological field notes taken during seven or eight monthly visits to each classroom and stimulated recall interviews based on those field notes. Participants and researcher examined and discussed the field notes in order to identify decision points in the participants' teaching and to explore the thinking behind the decisions.

Data analysis revealed that the decisions made by these new teachers were of two types: instructional and managerial. For each of these decision types, the primary categories of influence were student needs (the participants' perceptions of their students' future needs, i.e., skills and strategies needed for school, work, and life in general, and their more immediate needs, e.g., the specific skills and/or support needed in order to complete a given assignment)and prior experience (immediate, course-long, and children/adolescents in general). Other influences included normative influences (administration, curriculum guides, department regulations, etc.), availability of materials, university/teacher education programs, and professional development. Furthermore, the participants did not articulate the influence(s) on many decisions.

The findings suggest the need for enhanced pre-student teaching experiences, multiple sections of one preparation that will allow new teachers to refine their decision making, and mentor programs for new teachers.

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Introduction

In my younger and more vulnerable years my professors gave me some advice that I've been turning over in my mind ever since. Much of that advice has come to represent all that I think teaching is not. I don't make students outline book chapters, I don't make them sit in five rows of five, and I don't make them read books just because everyone else is and has been reading them for the past 100 years. E.D. Hirsch, author of the controversial and, in my opinion, misguided Cultural Literacy, argues that all students should read Fitzgerald's The Great Gatsby if only so that they will one day recognize a literary allusion such as the one in the opening line of this paragraph when they come across it. I thought so too. Once.

One of the first courses I took in the doctoral program at Rutgers University was Michael Smith's Teaching English in the Secondary School. Our term project was to create a unit of study. I chose to outline the literature unit I was using in my first year of teaching. I will never forget Dr. Smith's question to me in our first meeting concerning the project. "Why Ethan Frome?" he queried. Why Ethan Frome?! Was he out of his mind? Why not Ethan Frome? I read Ethan Frome when I was in the tenth grade. I loved it. My students would love it. This Smith guy was nuts. I thought.

Now, jump ahead two years. I happened to be at the public library one day when they were having a book sale. The aforementioned Cultural Literacy was in the stack of books marked "$1.00 each." I bought it. I read it. I GOT RIPPED OFF! This book wasn't worth $1.00 and this Hirsch guy was off his rocker. I ran into Dr. Smith later that day and mentioned the book and my reaction to it. "You," he said, "have changed." And so I had.

Where do beliefs come from? Blakey(1992) identifies three periods of influence on the novice teacher: prior to the university, at the university, and post university. Research indicates that students often enter teacher education programs with established ideas of what teaching entails (Britzman, 1991; Hollingsworth, 1989; Feiman-Nemser & Buchmann, 1985). Students' own experiences as learners and their political and moral beliefs dictate their views of learning and teaching. Prior to the university, prospective teachers' views on education have been shaped by the opinions and beliefs of their parents, previous work and living experience, religious beliefs, community involvement, and public schooling. In other words, novice teachers come to education programs with a preestablished set of beliefs about teaching.

Kagan reports that students often have clear images of good teaching that are related to their own classroom experiences as pupils (1992, p. 133). Once at the university, teacher education programs often conflict with these preconceived notions about education. As a novice, I had very strong ideas of what teaching was and how valuable my university classes would prove to be in making me a good teacher. Having experienced seventeen years of formal schooling, I based my beliefs on the fact that I had first hand knowledge of what worked and what didn't. Or so I thought.

As a new teacher, I quickly came to realize how atypical my own experiences had been. To paraphrase Mr. Fitzgerald once more, all the students in the world hadn't had the advantages (or the disadvantages) that I'd had. Because I had loved reading about Ethan and Mattie, I was shocked to discover that many of the students in my classes thought Wharton's novel "sucked." And this was just one of many shocking discoveries.

More than twenty years ago, Fuller and Bown (1975) revealed that teachers had long

thought of teacher education programs as inferior to field experience in the growth of the new teacher:

> [Teachers] teach one another. At least they believe they do. Under such conditions, formal teacher education could be seen as a sort of fiddler crab dance, a ritual parallel to, but essentially irrelevant to, the real business of learning to teach. That, many teachers believe, they do themselves. (p. 19)

Imagine my surprise. I'd sat through many lectures thinking just the same thing. But in my version, I already knew how to teach. My colleagues, however, didn't see it that way, my students had their doubts, and Dr. Smith was asking "Why Ethan Frome?" My "beliefs" about teaching were being challenged at every front.

Why had I chosen Ethan Frome? More than a generation between them, Au (1995) and Freire (1970) concluded that, in general, education facilitates conformity. Education is not neutral; education implies that one way of being is better than another way of being. In retrospect, I chose Ethan Frome because, in my mind, it represented "classic" American literature. At the beginning of my high school teaching career, I truly believed that the best thing I could do for my students, all of my students, was to prepare them for college. I wanted my students, many of whom were, like myself, from working class backgrounds, to be exposed to the literary classics, regardless of their own interests and concerns. In my case, political concerns governed my classroom decision making. Initial classroom experiences and knowledge gained from my continued graduate studies, however, caused the beliefs behind my decisions to be examined and refined. The study I am about to share with you examines the relative influence of teachers' own experience as learners, professional preparation, political beliefs, and initial classroom experience on the way they make curricular and instructional decisions.

A basic assumption in the field of teacher education is that teacher education programs are the primary influence in the thinking of new teachers. However, current research establishes that novice teachers come to education programs with preestablished beliefs about teaching and learning. A review of related professional literature reveals that while teacher education programs are one source of influence in the thinking of new teachers, several others also come to bear. First and foremost, novice teachers come to teacher education programs with preestablished beliefs about teaching; they often enter teacher education programs with established ideas of what teaching entails (Britzman, 1991; Hollingsworth, 1989; Feiman-Nemser & Buchmann, 1985). As Floden (1995) states, "teachers acquire most of their beliefs about teaching before they begin professional study, and these beliefs remain relatively unchanged by their experiences in most teacher education programs" (p. 4).

Students' own experiences as learners and their political beliefs can be just as influential as anything learned in teacher preparation courses. Britzman (1991) notes the existence of "cultural myths about teaching [which] may bear upon the expectations, desires, and investments one brings to and constructs during the process of becoming a teacher" (p. 6). Moreover, initial classroom experiences, or what Shimahara and Sakai (1995), among others (see Zeichner & Gore, 1990), call the "socialization of the teacher" may have the most influence on the beginning teacher:

> Learning to teach is a complex, intersubjective process that occurs in multiple social settings, including the classroom, hallways, the teachers' room, and other formal and informal places... learning to teach is a sustained process of intense

engagement in seeking advice from experienced teachers. (Shimahara & Saka, 1995, p. 123)

Consequently, from the time of enrollment in teacher education programs, through the initial field experiences, and then the first year of teaching and beyond, teacher beliefs and the decisions they influence evolve with each new experience. Because novice teachers continue to come to our programs with these preestablished beliefs, this study was intended to provide teacher educators with important information about the relative implications of the factors that influence the curricular and instructional decisions made by first-year English teachers. To that end, the following questions guided my inquiry: What did the participants/beginning teachers identify as decisions? What influences affected the decisions the beginning teachers identified? Did the influences which affected the beginning teachers' decisions change over time? Did patterns of influence emerge? Could those patterns be used to identify the beliefs that informed them? These questions were considered for each of four participants.

Description of the Study

The study was conducted at three high schools and two middle schools. All five schools have racially diverse populations and adequate financial resources. Two of the high schools are located in middle to upper middle-income, suburban communities. The third high school and the middle schools, likewise, draw students from middle income families. However, these latter schools are part of larger districts that have many economically disadvantaged students. Additionally, all five schools are located in close proximity to urban areas. Data collection occurred in actual classroom settings; however, normal classroom activity was not disrupted for the purposes of this study.

Four first-year English teachers were chosen to participate in this study. All four participants had been enrolled in my Seminar in Subject Field Teaching: English and Foreign Language during their student teaching semester. Marie and Lori (same-sex pseudonyms are used throughout for all four participants), who had recently earned graduate degrees in education, were teaching at a middle school and a large regional high school, respectively. Marie was the junior varsity cheerleading coach for one of the district's two high schools. Lori was serving as the temporary advisor to the school paper. Both teachers had worked with me on previous projects; however, I had worked more extensively with Lori.

The other two participants had recently earned bachelor of arts degrees in English education. Caroline taught at a middle school for the beginning of the study and then transferred to the high school in the same district when a full time position became available there. Betty was a part time English teacher at a large regional high school. She was also the advisor to the yearbook.

It is important to note the diversity among the participants with regard to degree held and level taught. This diversity reflects the diversity among teachers in general and allows for a consideration of whether degree held and level taught affected the decisions these beginning English teachers made. It is important to note, however, that this study addressed the decision making of four teachers; I do not intend to generalize for all teachers.

Data Collection

The data collection for this study occurred during the 1995-1996 school year which was the participants' first year of teaching. Observation appointments were made in advance and the participants were asked to advise their immediate supervisors of all scheduled observations.

During each of eight monthly visits to the participants' classrooms, I took descriptive field notes on what happened in the classrooms. Timing my arrival for observations to coincide with the bell signaling the end of the class before the one to be observed, I quickly took a seat at the back of the room and began to take notes concerning the physical environment and the informal interaction between teacher and students prior to the bell signaling the beginning of class. At the bell, I began noting the teacher's interaction with the students, looking for evidence of the curricular and instructional decisions as outlined here, as well as the students' interaction with each other. I was particularly careful to focus on the teacher's language, listening for cues to episodes and, as thoroughly as possible, transcribing the teacher's statements verbatim. Observation continued for one to three class periods per visit. Whenever possible, I arranged to observe two sections of the same preparation. The differences between the two often made for interesting reflection during the stimulated recall interview.

During the subsequent audio-taped stimulated recall interview, participants were presented with the handwritten anthropological field notes taken during their classes. Together, during the next scheduled break in teaching (lunch period, hall duty, preparation period, etc.) we examined and discussed these notes in order to identify decision points in the participants' teaching. As expected, these notes acted as a stimulus for inquiry into the thinking behind these decisions.

Part of the stimulated recall interview process for this study includes the identification of decision points. Hillocks refers to these decision points as "episodes" (1995, p. 329); according to Hillocks, "teachers almost always give some verbal clue to the change in episode, some more obvious than others." During the stimulated recall sessions, the participants and I looked for these verbal clues. Participants were lightly encouraged to address the types of curricular and

instructional decisions seen here; however, they were not forced to do so. For the most part, the participants were responsible for deciding where the decisions were. Overall, the participants identified two types of decisions: instructional and managerial. When the notes had been read and discussed, time permitting, the participants were free to discuss any other concerns they might have had. Very often they wanted to discuss how they were fitting into their English departments and their schools.

In addition to these stimulated recall interviews, during the first visit to each school, I conducted an initial interview with each participant in order to ascertain her motivation for becoming a teacher and her initial impressions of the school in which she would be teaching. This interview was what Bernard (1988) describes as a semistructured interview. Although the semistructured interview allows the participant free range in terms of response, an interview protocol is used. This slide illustrates the interview protocol used for this study. These questions were presented to the participants during a semi-structured interview held immediately after my first observation but prior to our first stimulated recall interview. Based on my review of the literature, broad categories of response were both expected and realized. For example, I expected the participants to talk about students, colleagues, and administration, and the level of involvement they were experiencing in terms of curricular decisions; all of the above were addressed in the stimulated recall interviews.

Data Analysis

The observation field notes and transcripts of the interviews were read in order to identify categories of decisions and influences on those decisions. Once all of the data had been coded, various categories of influence were defined. The category student needs came to represent those

decisions which were based on the participants' awareness of the skills, knowledge, and/or experiences that they felt should have been provided for their students. Many of the decisions identified by the four participants fell into this category. Further analysis of this category revealed the following sub-categories: students' future needs, i.e., skills and strategies needed for school, work, and life in general, and their more immediate needs, e.g., the specific skills and/or support needed in order to complete a given assignment. Prior experience represented the influence of initial/prior experiences with those or other students and those or other materials. Further analysis of this category revealed three subcategories: immediate prior experiences, course-long experiences, and prior experiences with children/adolescents in general). Other influences included normative influences (administration, curriculum guides, department regulations, etc.), availability of materials, university/teacher education programs, and professional development. Furthermore, many decisions fell into the category does not articulate influence. The results of this analysis were used to construct portraits of each of the four participants and her curricular and instructional decision making.

Marie

Marie completed her undergraduate studies in three and a half years, earning a degree in English and communications, and immediately entered a graduate teacher certification program. As a graduate student, Marie resented what she saw as a focus on theory at the expense of the practical knowledge she believed she would need in order to teach. Marie completed her initial field experience in one week; she rushed through this experience because she believed that this practical experience was not really necessary to becoming a teacher. Consistent with the findings of Lortie (1975) and others (Kagan, 1992; Zeichner & Gore, 1990), Marie rushed through this

assignment, gaining little, if anything, from having engaged in the experience. After graduation, Marie secured a teaching position at one of the middle schools in the district where she had student taught.

Marie identified forty-two decisions for the seven visits I made to her classroom. Sixty-two percent of these decisions were instructional decisions. The strongest articulated influence on these decisions was student needs; however, Marie did not articulate the influence on thirty-eight percent of her instructional decisions. The relatively high frequency of unexplored decisions (the other participants did not articulate the influences on ten percent or less of their instructional decisions) indicates a lack of reflection on the part of this participant.

Within the category student needs, a pattern of influence did emerge. All of the eight instructional decisions identified by Marie fell into the subcategory immediate needs. Marie's instructional decision making was heavily influenced by her perception of what students needed in order to complete their assignments. For example, Marie very often provided her students with graphic organizers that required the students to organize the details in the novels and stories they were reading. This indicated a belief that students process information best when they are able to create a visual representation of that information. Each time I visited her classroom, Marie's students were completing some sort of chart. More importantly, the information recorded on these charts was usually factual and plot oriented. This indicated a belief in the value of attending to details of plot, something that Marie had not learned in her university methods course, a course in which the professor placed emphasis on eliciting higher levels of processing. Floden (1995) states that "teachers acquire most of their beliefs about education before they begin professional study, and these beliefs remain relatively unchanged by their experience in most teacher education

programs" (p. 4); it appeared that Marie had held fast to this belief despite her university experience.

Thirty-eight percent of the decisions identified by Marie were managerial decisions. In terms of classroom management, immediate prior classroom experience had the greatest influence on Marie's decision making. Marie adjusted her classroom management style to reflect her students' reactions to her lessons and classroom rules.

On more than one occasion, and more frequently toward the end of her first year of teaching, Marie expressed dissatisfaction with veteran teachers and building administrators at her school. Marie felt that the veteran teachers were not as supportive of her as the teachers at the district high school had been during her student teaching semester. Additionally, Marie resented the fact that she did not have a mentor, yet when her immediate supervisor criticized Marie's use of the KWL strategy with disabled learners, Marie refused to reflect on her teaching with regard to the supervisor's ideas.

Overall, Marie's decision making reflected two core beliefs. Marie was aware of how her students reacted to certain situations and these reactions influenced her decision making. Thus, the first of these core beliefs was a belief in the importance of meeting students' needs. As she gained experience in the classroom, Marie's decision making reflected this experience; she even attributed decisions clearly influenced by the university to immediate classroom experience. Despite the fact that Marie failed to fully develop the reflective teaching stance that Zeichner and Liston (1996) have found to be essential to effective teaching practice, Marie had begun to reflect on the effectiveness of certain strategies and to change her practice accordingly.

The second core belief revealed in Marie's decision making and in our discussions about

her teaching was her belief in an ideal for the profession. This belief manifested itself in her reactions to students, colleagues, and administrators. Marie was concerned with her students' needs; however, she was not willing to allow those needs to affect her life out of school. For example, Marie resented the amount of her own time that she spent correcting papers and planning lessons. In terms of her collegial relationships, Marie felt that her peers were not supporting her the way her cooperating teacher and other teachers at the high school had during her student teaching semester. Likewise, Marie resented the supervisor who questioned her use of the KWL strategy with basic-skills students. In her defense, however, Marie's colleagues and administrators had let her down; as of our last meeting, Marie had yet to meet with her mentor; something that was required by law during the 1995-96 school year.

Caroline

While still in high school, Caroline decided that she wanted to become a teacher. After two years in the armed forces, Caroline entered an undergraduate teacher education program. While at the university, Caroline had mixed reactions to her coursework, consistent with Blakey's (1992) findings. After graduation, she began teaching for a large suburban school district, three classes per day in a middle school, two classes per day in the high school. Half way through the school year, Caroline transferred to the high school full time.

Caroline identified forty-one decisions for the seven visits I made to her classrooms. Caroline held very clearly developed ideas about what students needed to learn in their language arts classes; this idea is supported by the fact that seventy-three percent of the decisions identified by Caroline were instructional decisions. Almost half of these decisions were influenced by what Caroline perceived to be the needs of her students. A closer examination of the category student

needs reveals a pattern of influence. Decisions identified by Caroline as being influenced by student needs reflected Caroline's belief that her students were literary scholars-in-the-making and that she was preparing them for subsequent schooling. Prior experience and administration were also important influences on Caroline's instructional decision making. However, the primary influence on her decision making was student needs.

Eleven of the forty-one decisions (.27) identified by Caroline were managerial decisions. Prior experience was the strongest articulated influence on her managerial decision making; however, administration was also an important influence. Interestingly, Caroline identified almost twice as many managerial decisions after she transferred to the high school as she had while teaching at the middle school.

Like Marie, Caroline believed in an ideal for the profession; however, Caroline's vision embraced the idea of teacher as literary scholar. Her job, she felt, was to prepare students for subsequent schooling and continued literary scholarship. Once at the high school, where she was confronted with students who were clearly not interested in education, her vision was confounded. In response to this inconsistency, Caroline focused more on classroom management. Because she was not able to reconcile her beliefs about teaching with the reality of her current position, Caroline appeared to abandon her beliefs. The patterns of influence which had guided her decision making were no longer appropriate and a new pattern emerged.

Betty

Betty decided to pursue a career that would allow her to combine her love of reading with her desire to work with children. She reported having had a positive experience at the university, especially her education courses, which, Betty stated, provided a great deal of practical

information. Betty's experience contradicts the professional literature which suggests that novice teachers find their required education courses to be considerably less valuable than their initial field experiences (Blakey, 1992). This is not to suggest that Betty did not enjoy or benefit from her field experiences. On the contrary, Betty reported having had a positive pre-student teaching experience and a fruitful student teaching semester.

Betty's first teaching position was a part time position teaching English I and American Literature (English III) at a large suburban high school in a relatively affluent school district. Betty also served as the yearbook advisor. Because she was part-time, Betty's district was not required to provide a mentor, and Betty did not receive a great deal of support from her peers. She did, however, benefit from a sound working relationship with the inclusion teacher in one of her American literature classes.

Betty identified forty-two decisions for my eight visits to her classroom. Of these forty-two decisions, twenty-nine were instructional decisions (.69). The strongest influence on her instructional decision making was, by far, student needs. Seventy-two percent of Betty's instructional decisions (fifty percent of her decisions overall) were attributed to student needs. For the most part, these decisions were affected by Betty's perception of her students' immediate needs, suggesting Betty's belief in the worth of schools. For example, unlike Lori, who focused on the goals of the students, Betty worked within the system to accomplish the goals of the school. A closer look at the decisions Betty identified as being influenced by student needs revealed that such decisions clustered around activity and student interest; thus, a pattern of influence did emerge. The creative nature of her assignments and activities suggested Betty's belief that students should be actively engaged in learning.

Betty attributed two of her instructional decisions to prior experience. Just as she was concerned with students' immediate needs, she also reacted to her immediate classroom experiences. Additionally, Betty attributed two instructional decisions to administration. These decisions were out of character for Betty because they went against her perception of the students' needs. However, Betty appeared to believe in schools and the mission of schools. She was not willing to challenge administration.

Thirteen of the forty-two decisions (.31) identified by Betty were managerial decisions. Again, student needs was the strongest influence on her decision making. Betty attributed five of these thirteen decisions (.38) to students' needs for the future and to their more immediate classroom needs. An additional four decisions (.31) were attributed to the need to keep order. This influence may have been related to Betty's beliefs about what is expected of teachers.

Overall, Betty believed that school should be stimulating and enjoyable. Betty worked hard to provide engaging activities for her students. Additionally, she believed in the school's mission and she was reluctant to challenge that mission, even when it appeared to conflict with student needs, the strongest influence on Betty's decision making. Betty worked within the system to accomplish the goals of the school, something she believed was expected of teachers. Finally, over the course of her first year, Betty came to believe that she was not valued by the system she believed in.

Lori

After earning an undergraduate degree in English, Lori decided to become a teacher. Initially, Lori believed that teaching was much like performing, something she was very interested in doing. However, as she completed the required coursework in a graduate education program,

Lori came to realize that there was much more to teaching than she had originally thought. Lori enjoyed her university experience which allowed her to develop a "professional competence." Additionally, Lori felt that her methods course afforded her an appreciation of the amount of decision making in which teachers engage.

Lori began teaching at a large suburban high school where she taught three sections of English I, an S.A.T. preparation course, and a combined section of Journalism I and II and advised the school newspaper. For the most part, Lori enjoyed her students and her colleagues; she also enjoyed a vast network of professional and emotional support. This network included veteran English teachers, the English department supervisor, her mentor, other new teachers, and Lori's own younger sister who had just begun her first year of teaching.

Lori identified a total of thirty-nine decisions for my eight visits to her classroom. Twenty-four of these were instructional decisions (.62). Student needs was the strongest influence on Lori's instructional decision making. Lori attributed seventeen of her instructional decisions (.71) to student needs. For the most part, these decisions reflected Lori's appreciation of students' needs for school, both immediate and more distant. Lori believed that teachers should help their students gain the skills that will allow them to be successful not only in their current English classes, but in their subsequent classes as well. Lori's instructional decisions also indicated a belief in the value of the arts; e.g., Lori's belief that students should learn to appreciate poetry and begin to read poetry outside of school.

Because Lori had the good fortune to teach multiple sections of the same course (English I), she was able to use what she learned from each presentation of a lesson to strengthen subsequent lessons. Lori's appreciation of this fact highlighted her belief that she had "nine lives

as a teacher." This belief in her ability to learn from her mistakes and still remain in control of her class represented the strongest pattern of influence in Lori's teaching and decision making. Unlike Caroline and Marie, who held ideal visions of what school should be, Lori believed in the value of revision.

Lori identified fifteen managerial decisions (.39) for my eight visits to her classroom. While student needs was the most important influence on her instructional decision making, prior experience was the strongest influence on Lori's managerial decision making. Lori attributed six of her managerial decisions (.40) to prior experience; more than eighty percent of those decisions occurred in the second half of the school year.

Lori's decision making revealed four core beliefs. First, Lori believed that she was responsible for providing her students with tools for school. This belief manifested itself in Lori's concern for her students' immediate and future needs. Second, Lori believed that her effectiveness as a teacher would be valued according to her students' successes and failures. For example, Lori was very concerned that her students learn to use "major and minor supports" not only to make their arguments stronger, but also to insure that their tenth-grade English teacher would not find fault with her. Third, Lori, like Caroline, believed in the value of good literature. Consistent with Applebee's (1992) findings, when choosing content for a poetry unit, Lori selected many traditionally lauded poems with which she was familiar. She did not, however, select poems exclusively from the traditional literary canon; some of the poems she selected were written by former classmates at the university. Finally, Lori believed that it would always be possible to refine her teaching; for Lori, no mistake was irreversible.

A Comparison of the Four Participants

As the participants and I looked over my field notes, together we identified decision points. In general, these decisions fell into two categories. Instructional decisions included text/content selection, materials selection, and strategies/methods selection. Managerial decisions included organization, time management, and discipline decisions. Because they were students of the same teacher education program, it was not unreasonable to expect that the participants would share some beliefs about teaching and that these shared beliefs would influence their decision making in like ways. This expectation was realized in the fact that each of the four participants identified more instructional decisions than managerial decisions. This slide summarizes the decisions made by each participant for four categories of influence[1].

For each of the participants the frequency of instructional decisions was more than sixty percent. For these first-year teachers, teaching was more than simply keeping order. Britzman (1991) notes the "cultural myths" that surround teaching. These participants, despite their own preconceived ideas about teaching, moved beyond these myths and focused on instruction.

Overall, most of the instructional and managerial decisions identified by the four participants were based on their perceptions of student needs and prior classroom experience; however, despite the findings of Zeichner and Gore (1990), initial classroom experiences did not have the most influence on these beginning teachers. Marie attributed twenty-four percent of her

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[1] Most of the decisions made by the four participants fell into one or the other category. However, some decisions could be viewed as both instructional and managerial. When this phenomenon occurred, the decision was counted once for each type. Furthermore, it was not uncommon for a single decision to have more than one influence. Decisions with more than one influence were counted once for each influence.

instructional and managerial decisions to student needs: Caroline, thirty-nine percent; Betty, sixty-two percent; and Lori, forty-six percent. The category student needs refers to the participants' perceptions of their students' future needs, i.e., skills and strategies needed for school, work, and life in general, and their more immediate needs, i.e., the specific skills and/or support needed in order to complete a given assignment. For the most part, the participants addressed their students' immediate needs. Lori, however, often addressed more distant needs and expressed her concern that her own reputation as a teacher would depend on how well her students would perform in their future English classes.

Caroline, too, focused on the future; however, Lori's expectations for her students were more realistic ,and, therefore, more resilient. While Caroline hoped to prepare every student for college, despite their individual abilities and aspirations, Lori had begun with a group of students who were all bound for college[2]. When faced with the realities of her high school students' lack of interest in her subject, Caroline abandoned her vision and began to make many more managerial decision than instructional decisions.

Hayes and Kilgore (1991) found that new teachers expect support and assistance from veteran teachers and that this support helps new teachers develop a reflective teaching stance. Consistent with these findings, the decision making of the participants in this study appears to have been affected by the level of support they received from their fellow teachers and building level administrators. The apparent level of reflection in which each participant engaged, with the

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[2] It would have been interesting to see Lori at work with a group of students similar to those encountered by Caroline. However, all of Lori's classes were college preparatory classes.

exception of Caroline, correlated with the amount of support she received. Marie, the least reflective of the participants received little support from veteran teachers in her building and she did not interact with her assigned mentor. Lori, the most reflective of the participants, enjoyed a vast network of peer support including former classmates, fellow first-year and veteran teachers in and out of her department, the English department supervisor, her mentor, and her sister, who was also beginning her teaching career. Betty felt that she did not receive a great deal of support from teachers and administrators in her building; however, she and one of the inclusion teachers with whom she worked had a productive relationship. This relationship, I believe, allowed Betty to develop a reflective teaching stance. Both Betty and Lori were able to share their instructional and managerial decisions with others, resulting in a consistent match between curriculum and instruction.

The fourth participant, Caroline, reported receiving support from her supervisors and her fellow teachers. Unfortunately, there was no indication that this support moved beyond courtesy; Caroline did not discuss her decision making with her colleagues. Caroline's decisions were affected by staff development workshops. However, Caroline did not appear to have developed a reflective teaching stance. In fact, as indicated above, once she moved to the high school, her decision making became more reactive than reflective.

The rate at which Marie's decisions were affected by administration (.14) is consistent with that of Caroline (.17) but not with that of Betty and Lori (.05 each). This fact highlights an important distinction between the four participants. It appeared that both Betty and Lori were less likely to follow orders without question. Betty and Lori were more likely to examine their actions and their students' responses to them. Even when they did comply with department requirements,

Betty and Lori were able to find the value in such practice or were better able to align such practice with their own beliefs, e.g., when Betty saw the value in using Animal Farm as a precursor to more difficult novels. This is not to say, however, that Betty challenged administration. Both Betty and Marie complained about administration but did not challenge it. Betty, however, found ways to reconcile administrative requirements with her own practice.

Zeichner and Gore (1990) found that some novice teachers misinterpret the content of teacher education courses, thereby distorting the intentions of the course instructors. Furthermore, Scardamalia and Bereiter (1989) note that new teachers begin teaching with "radically simplified conceptions" of what teaching entails. These contentions were demonstrated in Marie's concern with plot over higher level thinking and in her misuse of cooperative learning strategies. The data also supported Feiman-Nemser's and Buchmann's (1985) contention that beginning teachers' preestablished beliefs about teaching prevent new teachers from appreciating the value of theories of education. Lori's ability to constantly revise her teaching, however, contradicted the findings of these researchers.

Implications for Teacher Educators

As evidenced by the experiences of Lori, and to a lesser extent, Betty, I conclude, as did Vinz (1995), that some new teachers have a greater understanding of their teacher education courses after they have had substantial classroom experience which includes a great deal of decision making. Extensive pre-student teaching is needed.

Ayers and Schubert (1994) and Britzman (1991) note that teacher educators place a high value on field experience. Because Lori and Marie began to rely more heavily on their own classroom experiences as the year progressed, I conclude that enhanced pre-student teaching

experiences held concurrent with coursework will enhance the novice teacher's ability to articulate her beliefs about teaching and allow her to begin to make better informed instructional decisions.

Given the large number of unarticulated decisions made by each of the participants, it is important that teacher education programs provide experiences that allow students opportunities to articulate their beliefs about teaching. This will in turn lead to the reflective stance called for by Zeichner and Liston (1996) and others (Fox 1993; Kilgore, Ross, & Zbikowski, 1990; Hollingsworth, 1989; Bollough, 1987).

Additionally, the multiple sections of one preparation assigned to Lori allowed her to develop into a reflective practitioner. School administrators should be sensitive to the value of placing new teachers in like situations. These multiple presentations of any one lesson will allow the first-year teacher to gain the maximum benefit from her initial classroom experiences.

My findings also suggest the importance of continued staff development, especially for first-year teachers. Experiences that allow new teachers to view the information gained in their coursework through the lens of their recently acquired classroom experiences will help to erode the "know-it-all attitude" that prevents new teachers from abandoning preestablished beliefs about learning and teaching (Feiman-Nemser & Buchmann, 1985). Furthermore, staff development experiences could provide the "instruction in the skills necessary for institutional survival" recommended by Bullough (1987, see also Bullough, 1989; Bullough & Baughman, 1997). Such experiences could be tied to the university, as is proposed by Kilgore, Ross, and Zbikowski (1990), who recommend the alteration of teacher education programs to include support for new teachers.

Finally, the importance of a mentor program for first-year teachers is highlighted by the findings of this study. Lori found the contact she had with her mentor to be very enlightening. She even spoke of "[mentor]izing" lessons. Betty, on the other hand, had no formal mentor but did state that she wished she had had that level of personalized support. The closest she came to such support was the inclusion teacher in her English III class. Marie's mentor experience was a worse-case scenario. At the time of my last visit with Marie, she had not had a single opportunity to sit down and talk with her mentor. In theory, the mentor program is meant to help new teachers bridge the gap between supervised teaching in the student teaching semester and the first year of teaching. My findings suggest that building administrators need to place more emphasis on the importance of the first-year teacher/mentor relationship.

Because one limitation of this study was the affluent school districts in which the participants taught, future studies of this nature should take place in less advantaged school districts. Additionally, a methodology which allows for the participants to articulate their beliefs about teaching before, during, and after their first year in the classroom must be developed in order to better address the research questions which guided this study. Finally, it would be interesting to conduct a post-tenure follow-up study with Betty and Lori in order to re-examine the influences on their decision making.

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